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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 2518
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TIRANA 000453

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/08/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [AL](#)

SUBJECT: THE CENTER OF POWER ON THE LEFT AND THE RIGHT

Classified By: Ambassador John L. Withers, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Although the outcome of the elections on June 28 are still uncertain and the next government lineup may not come into focus until September, certain leadership styles are likely to reign in the next government regardless of the outcome. And regardless of which party forms the next government, both Sali Berisha and Edi Rama are likely to play prominent, if not dominant roles in Albanian politics for the foreseeable future. Post spoke with journalists, politicians, and current and former political insiders from the left and the right to find a few general principles on what kinds of people will likely be government ministers, how decisions will be made, and who will likely have the most influence. It is the general consensus that if either the left or the right win, there is bound to be plenty of unilateral decision-making as both PM Sali Berisha and opposition leader Edi Rama have centralized leadership styles. Ministers in either an SP or DP coalition also may not be the most powerful or influential officials in government as people outside politics, such as media moguls and close associates, often have more influence with Berisha and Rama than do members of the party leadership. However, Rama, who has no experience running the national government, will be more insecure about his leadership and will probably seek guidance and approval from the international community) particularly the U.S. - for his decisions. Berisha will see a PD victory as positive affirmation for his policies and unilateral leadership style.

Berisha: Holding on by the Skin of His Teeth

¶2. (C) If Berisha is eventually certified the winner of the election and is able to form a government, he will likely re-enter the parliament with the slimmest of majorities. Even if Berisha and Ilir Meta's Movement for Socialist Integration (LSI) do eventually enter into a coalition, theoretically giving the PD at least 74 seats in the next Parliament, Berisha's majority will be a tenuous one. Berisha himself, however, will likely craft his re-election as a renewed mandate for his policies. Furthermore, a new electoral system that favors larger parties and a DP party list chock-a-block with loyalists allows Berisha not to be as concerned with balancing power within the coalition or the party. As of July 1, it appears that only two other parties in the DP coalition) the Republican Party and the Party for Democracy and Integration) will get one seat each in the next parliament, leaving the Democratic Party overwhelmingly in control of its coalition. And although Berisha has agreed "in principle" to a coalition with former PM Ilir Meta, it is far from certain that Meta and Berisha will actually close the deal or just how many ministries may be given to LSI members. Nevertheless, according to political contacts, Berisha is likely to fill most Minister positions with DP

loyalists. Former Foreign Minister Besnik Mustafaj and journalist Mero Baze (please protect), both erstwhile Berisha insiders, mentioned PM advisor Albana Vokshi as a likely influential minister in the next government.

13. (C) The prospect of a government packed with DP members increases the prospects of Berisha micromanaging policy decisions, as Berisha grants more autonomy to ministers from coalition partners than he does to ministers from his own party, according to Baze and DP strategist Ilir Rusmajli. Baze told Poloffs that Berisha keeps tight control over government ministers from his own party because he wants to prevent the emergence of any rivals within the DP. Baze elaborated by saying Berisha appoints three kinds of people as ministers: politicians with a track record of loyalty; people on whom Berisha personally has incriminating information; and unqualified politicians that will be indebted to the PM. For example, Berisha dislikes former Def Min Mediu on a personal level but invited him back into the coalition only because Berisha and Mediu have dirt on each other, according to Baze. (NOTE: Mediu is head of the Republican Party, which is part of the DP electoral coalition and part of Berisha's ruling coalition. END NOTE)

14. (C) Berisha's tendency to suppress potential rivals and grant influence only to those who don't pose a political threat suggests that ministers may not be the most influential in formulating policy, should Berisha receive another mandate. According to Baze, Berisha makes decisions without consulting ministers and has tightened his inner circle to the point that he only heeds advice from family

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members (especially his daughter) and from the owner of pro-DP TV KLAN, Aleksander Frangaj. Berisha, however, does at least inform government and party leaders of his decisions, once they are made.

RAMA

15. (C) In separate meetings, Baze and former PM and PS leader Pandeli Majko (please protect) described Rama's leadership style as being similar to Berisha's with a few key differences. Rama, like Berisha, makes political decisions without consulting PS leadership, but Baze claimed Rama one-ups Berisha by not even informing the party leadership of the decisions he has made, leaving his close associates the only recourse of watching tv to find out what's going on. Many Embassy contacts confirm that Rama's tendency to take on everything by himself often makes him a frantic and capricious leader. Rama is also similar to Berisha in that people outside the PS such as media moguls, businessmen, and NGO leaders often have more influence on Rama's thinking than party leaders, according to both Majko and Baze.

16. (C) Despite the similarities, Rama will likely differ from the incumbent in his confidence level. Observers told PolOff that Rama's lack of experience in running the national government will probably prompt him to be more susceptible to outside pressure and to persistently seek U.S. approval for his decisions. Majko claimed that Rama would present the Embassy with a list of potential ministers for approval prior to making any appointments. In order to ingratiate himself to the international community, Rama will seek a diverse cabinet lineup with a positive image, and he will grant the most influence to those with the most charisma and the closest ties to the U.S., according to Majko. (NOTE: Majko's assessment of potential ministers tracks with Rama's choice of candidates for SP lists. Rama has given prominent roles to several new faces such as Erion Veliaj and Vasilika Hysi, both of whom are well-known and well-liked among the international community. Rama often uses Veliaj to pass messages to the Embassy, and Veliaj has been described by many observers as Rama's "attack dog" during the campaign. END NOTE.) Both Majko and Baze told Emboffs that Rama would be more tolerant of rivals within the government and would

grant greater autonomy to government ministers, especially ones that wouldn't play a role in his domestic agenda, and both mentioned chairman of the G-99 party, Erion Veliaj as a likely candidate for a prominent ministerial post should the left win.

Maybe We're not so Different After All

17. (C) COMMENT: Certainly the most disturbing similarity between Rama and Berisha's leadership styles is a distinct authoritarian streak running through both men. Rama and Berisha colluded over the past year and a half to undermine the independence of the presidency via constitutional amendments in 2008, and Rama and the SP have shown they are at times willing to stand aside while Berisha attacks the Prosecutor General and judiciary. Both Rama and Berisha are known within their respective parties as near control freaks who frantically texted candidates during live TV debates with talking points and instructions. Berisha's penchant for undercutting independent institutions will only be reaffirmed with a second mandate - Tirana is already bracing for his anticipated next assault on the judiciary as a means of quashing the Gerdec case - and Rama's tendency to concentrate decision-making power in his own hands suggests he might furtively seek to weaken independent institutions should those institutions challenge his authority. The media is said to be Rama's bugaboo. No matter who ends up running the country when Parliament convenes in the fall, apolitical institutions and free media could continue to find themselves under political pressure.

WITHERS